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H.B. 6676

AN ACT CONCERNING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT LONGEVITY INITIATIVE  
ON THE STATE- WIDE BASIS.

Testimony before the Judiciary Committee

Submitted by Silvina Etchegoyen

April 1, 2013

Good morning Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, and members of the Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you this morning/afternoon. My name is Silvina Etchegoyen; I am a graduate student in Social Work at the University of Connecticut, School of Social Work, and I am here today to testify in favor of Raised Bill 6676 An Act Concerning Implementation of the Project Longevity Initiative on the State – Wide Basis, which would reduce gun violence in the state of Connecticut.

In communities around Connecticut, there is an imperative need to STOP gun violence. After the horrendous act of violence that occurred in Newtown, and the horrendous acts of gun violence occurring every day in cities like Hartford, New Haven, Waterbury, Bridgeport, our population is living in a highly traumatized state. The State of Connecticut has the responsibility to dignify people's standard of living by providing security, education, healthcare, and well-being to everyone.

Violence is a structural social problem that needs a structural social solution, and the implementation of this Project Longevity will help to build better communities by having a sincere and open dialogue, by developing a critical constructive point of view, by creating responsible popular participation and social inclusiveness. However, this Project Longevity will also STOP the violence in our communities if it provides transitional help for those who want to move out of the gang lifestyle, by assisting them with educational, health and mental health services, employment, housing, witness protection programs, and other needs.

As a Social Worker I had a chronically ill patient with a mental health and substance abuse condition who never had access to mental health services. At the age of 14 he was forced by his father to join the family business: organized crime. Since then, he was never able to get out of the "business" and has been victimized by his own father and peer group, and he has been unable to access mental health services.

Simply, he was avoiding healthcare professionals so they would not suffer intimidation nor harm from criminal groups. He knew that there was no safe place for him in this society. He knew if he opened his mouth, he would be killed. He was a child when this happened to him. He was a child without any social protection, without anyone to trust.

I am wondering today, how many fourteen, sixteen, or eighteens are out there in our communities living under the same type of condition, with clearly an impediment to use their right of freedom of speech.

Gun violence and any type of violence affects not only the victims and victimizers, it affects us, our families, our neighbors, our communities, our country, and our world. The Project Longevity Initiative will allow communities to develop a sense of peaceful commitment and trustful collectiveness.

Based on evidence-based research from the Center for Crime Prevention and Control at John Jay College, The Project Longevity Initiative has been implemented in different cities at different times in the U.S. According to the Campbell Systematic Reviews published in 2012, the Project Longevity has been shown statistically significant reductions in youth homicides and other indicators of serious gun violence.

Ensuring this Initiative sustainability will be necessary not only to measure data outcomes throughout an evidence-base practice and rigorous randomized controlled trials; but also to include the participation of all social actors involved in the decision making process, regardless of their level of education, race, social class, or nationality.

I urge you to support this bill that will help to STOP gun violence in our communities.

Thank you for taking the time and interest in my testimony. I welcome the opportunity to address your questions.